

Plan C
Themed Academy Approach
May 13, 2015

I. High Schools

Cleveland High School and Eastside High School will continue to exist and students may enroll in either school.

Diplomas will be issued under the name of each school. There will be graduation ceremonies unique to each school.

II. Themed Academies

The District will create academies organized around academic and career themes. Participation in these academies will be available to all students at both Cleveland and Eastside.

Examples of these programs could include an “Academy of Art, Journalism, and Design,” an “Academy of Robotics, Engineering, Science, and Technology,” an “Academy of Culinary Arts, Hospitality, and Tourism,” and an “Academy of Medical Technology and Health Sciences.” Surveys to gauge student interest at the middle school level will be conducted, as well as interviews with alumni, community, and civic interests.

In addition to the specific themes, the following questions remain open for discussion: 1) the number of academies, 2) whether all students will be required to select an academy or whether some will remain in a general education program, 3) how to handle students who are interested in advanced placement classes versus those in need of remedial programming, 4) whether the International Baccalaureate program should continue, 5) how dual credit/enrollment programs at Delta State University might be incorporated.

Creation of exciting, themed academies is likely to ensure diverse student enrollment within each academy. The absence of academic thresholds for participation in the academies will further enhance a racially diverse demographic in each academy. All consultants and experts familiar with the focus group meetings agree that choice is an important value expressed by parents during the focus group meetings. By allowing students to choose their themed academy, the District avoids mandatory assignment, assignment practices based on race, and lottery systems. As discussed below, however, some consideration will need to be given to the possibility that a program might be oversubscribed.

Within each academy, students will participate in certain academic programming with their cohort group, *i.e.*, other students who are enrolled in that particular academy. The District anticipates providing classes specifically geared to the themes of the academies, for example a class about potential careers in the arts, journalism, and design (including graphic design) may be offered in a “School of Art, Journalism, and Design.” Additionally, students may attend other classes to fulfill graduation requirements, like math and English, within the academy and within their cohort group. These required classes will also be designed to complement the thematic content. (There will be other classes that are taken outside the academy and, therefore, away from the cohort group. For example, a student in the arts academy may wish to take a class in robotics or culinary arts as an elective. Details about this remain to be sorted out).

Another valuable component of the academy experience will be frequent field trips to places of interest related to the theme of the academy. For example, students in an Academy of Culinary Arts, Hospitality, and Tourism may visit restaurants, hotels, places of touristic interest, and Delta farms producing fresh vegetables, cheeses, etc. These field trips are another opportunity for the cohort group to foster relationships and interaction centered on an area of common interest.

The District will develop broad community support for the themed academies by enlisting help from community business and civic leaders. For example, Baxter Health Care or the local hospital may be invited to participate if an academy of "Medical Technology and Health Sciences" or other similarly themed academy. The Grammy Museum could be enlisted with regard to a number of academies, including one centered on the arts or one centered on culinary and touristic themes.

A key component of the development of the academy experience will involve scheduling. (Whether, for example, both high schools operate on a block schedule or an eight-period day). An important component of the scheduling process is to decrease the frequency and need for transportation back-and-forth between schools. For example, it may be appropriate to house the science and math faculty at Eastside and the English and arts faculty at Cleveland. On those days students take science and math courses, they might report to Eastside for all or part of the school day. On the days students take English and arts courses they might report to Cleveland for all or part of the school day. An important part of this approach is that all students, regardless of their enrollment status, will be attending classes for significant amounts of time at both schools. Details will depend on scheduling factors and other issues to be further refined.

III. Extracurricular Activities

The District will review its extracurricular programs to determine if the programs may be incorporated into a themed academy. For example, although a drama club may be open to all students regardless of high school enrollment or academy enrollment, the club may operate under the umbrella of an arts-related academy.

Students will participate in athletic extracurricular activities at the high school in which they are enrolled. This will preserve school identity and foster community support and pride in each high school. Additionally, the Board sees the maintenance of as many sports teams as possible as a critical component of the District's overall educational mission. This is so for all students regardless of race. The Board believes encouraging students to participate in athletic programming is important for development of self-esteem, discipline, teamwork, and interaction with positive role models. Finally, the Mississippi High Activities Association sets out rules and regulations governing participation in sports. For this reason, maintaining different athletic structures and identities is necessary. For example, students cannot participate in athletics across the two high schools without subjecting the schools to potential violations and without individual students being rendered ineligible to play for certain periods of time.

IV. Vocational Technical School

The District is interested in bolstering its already successful Vocational-Technical School. As the Government and Plaintiffs are aware, this program is already racially diverse and provides a key component to the District's successful efforts to improve integration. The Board believes further refinements to the program would benefit all students. A question to be addressed will involve how the Vocational-

Technical School fits into the academy concept. For example, will the Vo-Tech become its own academy or will Vo-Tech students select an academy?

V. Middle School

The District proposes creating a single middle school at the current Margaret Green Junior High for all students in grade 6 (who do not attend Hayes Cooper or Bell) and all students in grades 7 and 8.

Heavy emphasis will be placed on preparing middle-school students for participation in the academies. This will include, particularly in grades 7 and 8, acquainting students with the array of choices available so that they are prepared to make a selection from the available academies. Perhaps the middle school itself will be styled as an “academy” with different areas of interest presented to students enabling them to follow a path directly into a themed academy.

Another detail to be resolved will involve how students select an academy during their 8th grade year. Perhaps students could rank the available academies in order of preference and, in the event a particular academy is oversubscribed, a student would be assigned to his or her second choice.

VI. Timeframe for Implementation

The time involved in implementing the themed academy approach will depend on the number of academies created and, perhaps, the particular themes selected. Careful consideration must be given to the question of whether to roll out all themed academies at once or to devise a number of them with plans to offer additional academies in the future. Teachers will likely need additional certification. At a minimum, the 2015-16 school year will be required to build additional classrooms and to develop themed programs.

We believe a Board meeting can be specially called for the Board to deliberate regarding the academy proposal within one week. This proposal has not been formally presented to the Board at this time.

VII. How to best use time allotted for hearing

We propose utilizing next week to further refine the themed academy concept. The question of whether the parties will need a mediator or facilitator may depend on whether there are major differences between this proposal, the Government’s ideas about the proposal, and the ideas of the Board. We suggest further discussions regarding this topic. If the remaining items to be decided are in the nature of details regarding academic programming, scheduling, etc., the parties may find that a mediator is unnecessary. In that case, we suggest direct collaboration of our policymakers and experts. This could likely be accomplished over a two-day period (retreat) in lieu of the hearing.